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EDUCATIONAL MEMINISCENCES

Of One-Third of a Century
in Winnipeg 1871 to 1904



1871-1904

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Thirty-four years ago the little village of Winnipeg, with a population of 215 souls, was under military rule—Fort Garry being occupied by the Ontario Rifles, who had, under Colonel Wolseley, penetrated the wilds from Lake Superior to Red River. Among these guardians of the honor of Canada there were as officers, our present Governor, Sir Daniel McMillan, Judge Walker, Hon Hugh John Macdonald, Col. Scott, Collector of Customs, Major Stewart Mulvey, Secretary of City Schools, and Dr. Codd, still surgeon of the forces.

An early writer of Winnipeg annals says of that year (1870): "We had no bank, no insurance office, no lawyers, no city council, no taxes—one doctor, one policeman, and only sterling money—Company's notes—of denominations of five pounds, one pound, five shillings, and one shilling. These were known as "Hudson's Bay blankets."

In the summer of that year there was no railway, no stage coach, no passenger steamer, no express, and no telegraph. There was one weekly newspaper—think of it, no Free Press—no governor, no legislature, and the only waterworks consisted of a barrel drawn on wheels by a patient ox, all under the direction of a well-known retired sergeant of artillery.

No mayor was there, no health officer, no schoolhouse, no barber, and no watchmaker. There was a jail and courthouse—a small log building near the fort—but it was in bad repair, and the one policeman, a valiant Irishman, was taken by a band of sportive citizens, bound to a cart, and safely deposited in durance vile.

The writer already quoted states "that though lacking several so-called advantages of civilization, the people were, to say the least of it, tolerably virtuous and unmistakably happy."

It was the lot of the traveller of those days to arrive by stage coach—coming over the Minnesota and Dakota plains for four hundred miles. In the year following that described, the present writer arrived, and is thus able to give personal reminiscences of between thirty-three and thirty-four years. The recollections to be given to-night will be chiefly confined to reproducing some of the more stirring educational events of one-third of a century in Winnipeg.

THE PRIMITIVE SCHOOLS.

The bridging over of the gap between the old Red River schools and those of the new Province of Manitoba was accomplished by the

School Act, approved in 1871 by Governor Archibald. When the writer arrived in October, 1871, the party spirit engendered by the Riel rebellion was still high. A Fenian raid had just occurred, and this still further heightened the feeling. The School Act had been adopted by a majority in the Legislature. The old schools had belonged to the churches. Of these half were Protestant and half Catholic. The Protestant schools all belonged to the Church of England or the Presbyterian Church. The member for Kildonan, Mr. John Sutherland, had made a vigorous effort to introduce national schools. This bill was a good one, and the writer remembers on arrival to have perused it with much interest. But it had been defeated. The people of Manitoba, unaccustomed to law or representative institutions, were dazed by the suddenness with which their duties fell upon them. The



Kildonan School in Which the First Classes of Manitoba College Were Held, Nov. 10, 1871.

newcomers were dissatisfied, but power was not in their hands. Rarely has a more remarkable case of putting new wine into old bottles been known than that found in Manitoba in the autumn of 1871. It was in this stormy atmosphere that Manitoba College was established, but it was somewhat favored by being situated in the peaceful retirement of old Kildonan—more than four miles from the storm centre of young Winnipeg.

A NOTABLE SCHOOL.

As for the first two months of its existence, Manitoba College obtained quarters for its seven students in a part of the Kildonan school building, it may be well to describe this, which was said to have been the best school in Red River Settlement. The building, soon to be

replaced by a new edifice, was built of stone by the Rev. James Nisbet, largely with his own hands, in 1864. An excellent Ontario teacher, Mr. D. B. Whimster, had raised the school in 1870 to its high place. The scholars were of the sturdy Highland type, for there were few of native blood in Kildonan. The first noticeable feature on entering the well-filled schoolroom, was that the children all wore moccasins, and certainly the noiselessness of their movements in coming to and going from class was an advantage. The speech of the scholars, though somewhat strange to a Canadian, was at bottom the guttural dialect of Scotland, modified by absence from its fatherland for two generations or more. The writer remembers to have been present at the annual school meeting of Kildonan in 1871. The chief point of discussion was whether it would be the better plan to support the school by the old method of subscription or to adopt the new law which had been passed by the Legislature, which permitted a tax to be levied upon the school district. The transition was made in the following year, and without any serious amount of friction, the Protestant and Catholic schools accepted the new conditions, and became a part of the new Manitoba system.

THE FIRST WINNIPEG SCHOOL.

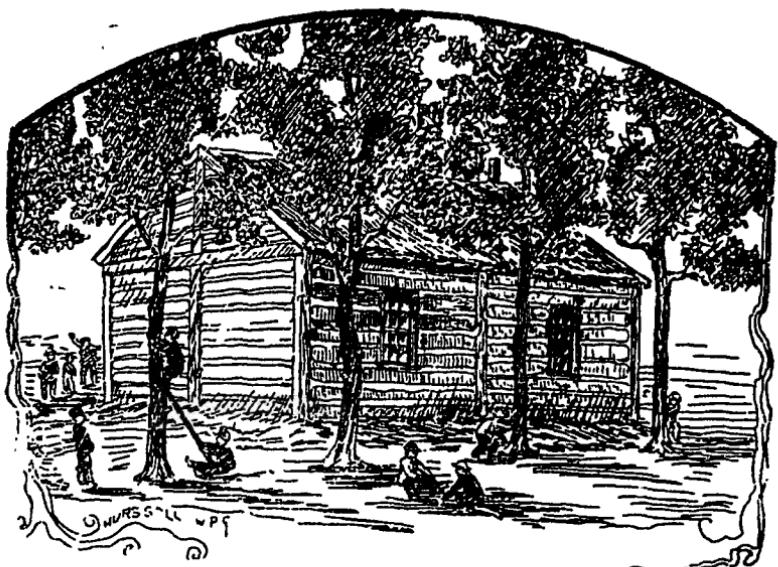
A special interest always belongs to first things. The forerunner of the splendid system of sixteen Public School buildings now possessed by Winnipeg is worthy of notice. A small log building, a rented building at that, standing among the beautiful cluster of trees at the foot of Henry Street, known at the time as "Fonseca's Maple Grove," has this distinguished pre-eminence. The writer remembers that this school was begun within two weeks of his arrival in Manitoba, viz., on 31st October, 1871. There had been the school of St. John's Parish, with a wooden building which stood in isolation on the plot of ground now set apart as St. John's Park, on Main Street North. But this, on the introduction of the new regime, fell into disuse, and the Fonseca Grove school stands first in the continuous line. The first teacher was Mr. W. F. Luxton, the founder afterwards of the "Free Press," and now Inspector of Public Buildings for Manitoba. A chronicler of the time says: "It is not on record that the boys found him a severe taskmaster."

The influx of new settlers was great in the first half decade of the life of the young Province. The growth of Winnipeg and settlement of new western points soon began to change the outlook of the people. Being largely from Ontario, the new settlers clamored for laws and institutions such as they had left behind them, and even sought after more radical measures than their native province would accept. Three newspapers in Winnipeg represented the several elements: "The Manitoban," the old settlers; "The Liberal," the Canadian extremists; and the "Free Press," the more moderate Canadian element. Their comments upon each other partook at times of the nature of a prairie blizzard, at other times of a southern sirocco. At all times the editors were more emphatic than polite. In 1873 appeared in the "Free Press" a series of four communications known as the "Argus Letters," dealing in a slashing manner with educational topics. It was never quite known who the author of these was, but their tone was fierce and uncompromising. The letters found fault with the religious denominations for seizing hold of the public school system, showed the inconsistency of

the colleges in maintaining preparatory departments, pointed out grave defects in the schools in existence, and called for reformation and advance. In addition to the college preparatory departments at this time in the three existing colleges, the Methodist Church was maintaining in Winnipeg a preparatory institution known as the Wesley Institute, which was closed in 1876. Dr. George Young answered "Argus," as did also the present writer.

DOWN WITH THE LORDS!

The newspaper discussion brought, in the following year, the matter of improving the educational system before the government of the day. Mr. Davis, the Premier, took the matter up very heartily. A bill, with many improvements, was carried through the Legislative Assembly. But Manitoba possessed at this time one of the most unique legislative bodies that ever existed in Canada. It had a second



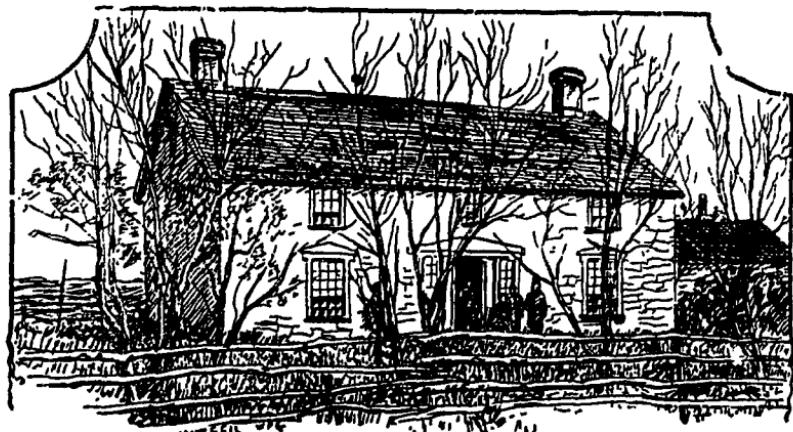
First School House of Winnipeg, 1871.

chamber known as the Legislative Council. This "House of Lords" consisted of seven gentlemen, three of whom are still living. Two of the seven represented the Metis, and were little more than able to write their names, though respectable citizens. The school bill, which passed the lower house, was completely emasculated in the upper, and came back in such a mutilated condition that its promoter could scarce recognize it. The writer remembers well the rage of Premier Davis, and his vengeance vowed against the lordly seven. In the following year it is worthy of remark that the Legislative Council was abolished, and "Ichabod" written on its high pretensions.

AN ABORTIVE AGITATION.

In the year 1876 a very radical proposal was brought up in the Protestant section of the Board of Education. The dissatisfaction expressed with the school system as existing led the Government to

endeavor to meet the criticisms by an infusion of new blood into the Board of Education. The experiment can hardly be said to have been successful. The new members, having obtained the upper hand, in October of the year mentioned passed certain resolutions embodying principles which would have completely overturned the Provincial legislation of 1871. Great excitement was produced when this became known. Several members of the Protestant section absented themselves from the meetings of the section, or in the end withdrew from the Board altogether. The Catholic section of the Board was up in arms, for the effect of the resolutions would have been to overthrow what they considered essential in the clauses of the Manitoba Act of the Dominion establishing the Province. In recalling these resolutions, one is struck with the plan of "Thorough" which the reformers proposed. The new bill embodied the following provisions: 1. A purely non-sectarian system of public school education; 2. One inspector; 3. Compulsory use of English in all Public Schools; 4. One system of administration; 5. A normal school; 6. The same require-



Building Used as Manitoba College, Kildonan, Jan. 1, 1872.

ments for every class of candidate for teachers' certificates; 7. A united Board of Education; 8. A *pro rata* division of government grants to all schools. This bill, however, fell through at the time, though it involved in the main the provisions that were embodied in the legislation of twelve or thirteen years afterwards. Peace was then restored for the time by the removal from the Board of the more violent of the agitators.

THE FIRST CITY BOARD.

Winnipeg had been made a city in 1874, and in the following year had upwards of 3,000 inhabitants. Its importance, and the preponderance of Canadian sentiment, had largely inspired Premier Davis to make the sought-for advances in education. The defeat of the bill carried through the Assembly, but killed in the Legislative Council, and the abortive effort just described led to a movement to obtain a city Act of Education, such as was in vogue at the time in the cities of Ontario. It was a red-letter day when this concession was obtained,

and the people given the power to elect twelve trustees, and largely control their own educational affairs. True, Winnipeg had, as we saw, in 1871, begun a school. On a site obtained from the Hudson's Bay Company, where Grace Church now stands, the first school building belonging to the city was erected. The first trustees, among whom was the veteran educationalist, now Secretary of the City Schools, Major Mulvey, struggled against many difficulties. Imperfections in the school law made it an impossibility to collect taxes in the village of Winnipeg, the school district was greatly in debt, and one teacher was with the greatest difficulty paid. When the new Board was appointed in 1876, great things were expected of it. In the newspapers of 1876 is to be found a scathing report upon this school by the writer, who was a member of the new Board and its first inspector.

THE FIRST CENTRAL SCHOOL.

There was a breeziness, independence, and incisiveness about the Board of twelve which grappled with the city problems. Indeed, in the first decade of its history, all Winnipeg was famed for the celerity and ease with which it could organize and carry through an indignation meeting on any of its many problems.

On the Board three members were chosen by each of the four wards of the city. In one year a deadlock for several months existed in the choice of a chairman—the vote being six and six, while every one of the twelve members was voted on and defeated. The contest was always between the north and south ends of the city. It is no wonder that a chronicler of the time speaks of “The Festive School Board.”

On the choice of a site for a Central School (the Victoria and Albert of to-day) the opposition broke out in full force. The two camps of warriors—six and six—stood arrayed with their glittering spears. The South end insisted on the old site; and the Northenders on the present site. Pathetic appeals were made by the men of the South that the present site would be inaccessible from Main Street; that children would be frozen in winter on crossing the open plain to the site, bounded by Ellen and William Streets. The struggle was only ended by the desertion of a Southender, for which, however, the unfortunate man lost his business position at the hands of the company under which he was employed. Happier days, however, in time dawned on our educational Solons.

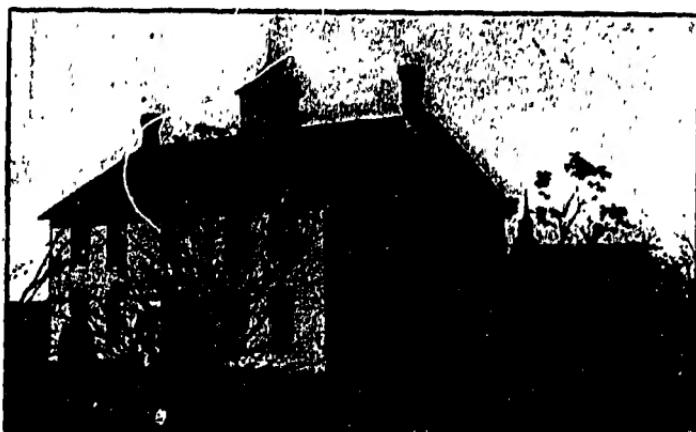
THE OLDTIME COLLEGES.

In these days of university co-operation, it is difficult to realize the state of college education thirty years ago. St. Boniface then occupied the building afterwards used as town hall in our French suburb; St. John's old building stood close to the river side, near Bishop's Court, the residence of Bishop Machray at the time. The older of these institutions claimed to have existed for fifty years, a part of the time as Bishop Provencher's school. St. John's, in modern form, was then half a dozen years old. Manitoba College, begun in Kildonan, four miles from the city, occupied the first log college building in October, 1872. These three represented not only religious bodies, but three races. St. Boniface (Roman Catholic) was chiefly employed in educating the Metis; St. John's (Church of England), largely led the English natives; and Manitoba (Presbyterian), the Scottish people of

Kildonan. But who can describe the difficulties of carrying on institutions in that good old time! The scarcity of supplies, the expense of importing necessary articles over four hundred miles of prairie from the nearest railway station; the impossibility of obtaining the carpenter, painter, mason, or plasterer; the price of lumber, \$70 a thousand feet in 1871; all these bring up ugly spectres of the past that we would fain have remain in their graves. Each college went on its own way, had its own curriculum and its own especial worries. The situation was somewhat changed by the removal of Manitoba College to Winnipeg, and its purchase of its first building in Winnipeg.

THE UNIVERSITY.

In the beginning of 1875, a meeting of much importance was held in the Winnipeg Courthouse by the authorities of Manitoba College. At it Chief Justice Wood, Mayor Kennedy, Consul Taylor, and Dr. Robertson, all of whom have passed away, spoke along with the pro-



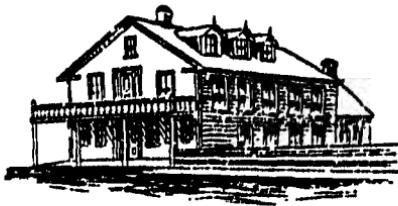
The Log Manitoba College, Kildonan, October, 1872.

fessors. The topic of the evening was the establishment of a university. It was certainly a great project for a Province of 20,000 people to undertake. But the men of those days were full of faith. Inspired by the stimulating ozone of the Manitoba air they regarded heavy burdens as light. It was a thing of the future, and we faced it, little thinking that in last year 812 candidates would present themselves for examination. Plainly, we builded better than we knew. The University was begun in 1877, and in that winter (77-78), known as the black winter, when there was little snow, and the Red River remained open at some points for the whole winter season, many visits did we make to St. John's to spend the whole evening in planning a curriculum. The roads were impassable, and on the river we drove on our errands. The scene comes before me of the two professors and a driver being wrecked by a runaway on the river, the professors deposited upon the sheet of ice, and the buggy dashed to splinters. But such obstacles did not prevent the completion of the first curriculum. The first meeting of the Council in October 4, 1877, was a unique gathering of the various interests; very stiff and formal it was—very uncertain of the future—and the different sections afraid

of losing some of their privileges or prerogatives by the union formed. The venerable Chancellor, who lived to be with us until last year, was a natural leader, both from his learning and position. The agreement secured was a surprise to all, and the fact that seven students presented themselves in May, 1878, showed that the effort of the founders had not been in vain.

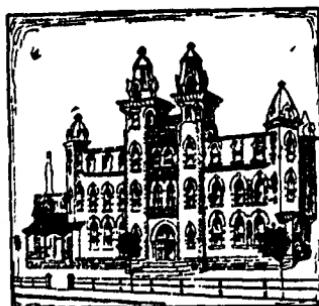
A COUNCIL MEETING.

Oftentimes the Council meetings were breezy and entertaining. There was always the aggressive younger element pushing on the



The Wooden Manitoba College Building, Main St., Winnipeg, 1875.

claims of the University, and the older and more staid advocates of the College rights and claims. The Dominion land grant of 150,000 acres, bestowed upon the University under the Better Times Act of 1875, was a subject of constant debate. The title, the location, the immediate choice, all led to warm discussion. Had the choice been made three years earlier, the land grant, now worth some million and a quar-



The Brick Manitoba College, Ellice, St., Winnipeg, 1882.

ter dollars, might have been two millions of dollars in value, on account of better class of land open in the Province from which to select. It is a remarkable fact that a body composed of so many elements should have been able to do any business, but the measure of success achieved must be a perpetual tribute to the fairness, the breadth and common sense of the members of the Council. Undoubtedly the material bonds which kept the University together were the land grant of 150,000 acres, and the Isbister bequest of \$83,000. The perfecting of the title to the lands, the choice of a university site, and the erection of the

university building, are the chief burning questions which have agitated the University Council. It is questionable whether our Council now, of upwards of fifty members, will ever again see the well-nigh Homeric contests of the good old times.

THE BOOM DAYS.

The coming of the Canadian Pacific Railway, and its hurried construction to the West, opened up the West to the embrace of the whole world. Donald A. Smith and his colleagues were the wizards who worked the transformation. No history of Manitoba can be made which does not involve very largely the national movement marked by the excitement known as the "boom" of 1881-1882. A remote and backward region jumped at a bound into notoriety. Fortunes were made and lost in a day. The real estate offices rose from dozens to hundreds. A rush of population took place from Eastern Canada; buildings arose as if by magic, and a boundless vision appeared before the eyes of all men. True, disaster followed in 1882 and succeeding years, but meantime Winnipeg and the West had become known, and were henceforth to be counted on in Canadian and North American civilization. Education secured its share of the common impulse. A new building was begun and in 1882 was occupied by Manitoba College. St. John's also erected their present building about the same time; and St. Boniface then planned its new building. At the same time the Medical College came into operation, and laid the foundation of its present usefulness. The city schools also multiplied, and the beginnings were made which have resulted in the splendid collection of school buildings in Winnipeg to-day.

THE DEPRESSION.

The complete collapse of the business inflation brought back the people of the West to their senses. The railway had come, but the staple products of export of the West were yet to develop ere there could be prosperity. Landowners were poverty-stricken, enterprises of pioneers were checked, confidence in the country and in each other was lost. The colleges and schools were thrown back for a decade. As an example, our subscription list of Manitoba College for \$11,000, was practically obliterated. And for a decade after the boom agriculture was a failure. The people were discontented. The financial affairs of the Province fell into confusion. Those were long and weary years!

EDUCATIONAL REVIVAL.

In 1889 the Province was convulsed by the introduction of what became known as the Manitoba School question. The positions of the former bill proposed in 1876 were in the main revived. The determination to establish national schools was first announced by Hon. Joseph Martin, Attorney-General, probably inspired by Mr. Dalton McCarthy, a distinguished Independent politician from Toronto, who was elected by Brandon constituency. It seems to have owed its origin to no special individual, but was one of the movements begun spontaneously by the people who had seen the days of the "Argus Letters," the Davis bill of 1875, and the abortive effort of 1876. Now it took possession of the public mind. This was most certainly the greatest public movement ever seen in Manitoba. For ten years it

dominated all other questions in the Provincial arena. The bills abolished all separate schools, and made one system for the Province. It divided the control of schools into two parts: one giving the management of business and administration into the hands of the Cabinet, acting as an educational board; the other establishing an advisory board of educational experts, having the settlement of all purely educational matters. One of the most debatable features of the bill was the question of religious instruction in the public schools. The promoter of the bill was an ardent secularist. The bill, as at first printed, gave no opportunity for religious instruction in the schools. This the proposer defended on the ground of absolute equity as he termed it. It was pointed out to him that this was a purely mechanical expedient for surmounting a difficulty. In the same way as disease and pain might be ended in a sick man by his death, so a certain degree of peace might be gained by the sacrifice of vitality in education. Mr. Martin



The Present Manitoba College, Winnipeg, 1892.

was subjected to great pressure on this matter. He wavered greatly on the subject, but was compelled by public opinion to concede the recognition of the Supreme Being and the Bible in the Public Schools, as a fundamental idea held in all Canadian communities. Against the proposed changes, Archbishop Tache, a very great man, of long standing and influence in the country, took the traditional position of his church. The Government of Mr. Greenway, backed by the great mass of the English-speaking people, took their stand in favor of national schools. The very greatest excitement prevailed. On the night when the School Bill was introduced by the Attorney-General in the Legislative Chamber, both the galleries and the floor of the house, were absolutely packed with spectators. In the introduction of the bill, Mr. Martin, reaching the clause in favor of religious instruction, said: "Mr. Speaker, I am opposed to this clause on religious instruction—but in some matters we are compelled to go slow." The bill was carried, and the system put into effect in 1890.

LITIGATION.

After some time began the litigation on behalf of the separate school advocates, conducted under the able management of Mr. J. S. Ewart, Q.C. This was supported on the ground that the new law violated the provisions of the Manitoba Act of 1870, under which the Province existed. The Government, on behalf of the people, defended the case with the utmost pertinacity. The law was decided in November, 1890, by the Manitoba Courts at Winnipeg, to be valid, then by the Supreme Court of Canada to be ultra vires, but afterwards on the appeal to the Privy Council at London, was declared in July, 1892, to be good. The agitation for a year before, and for two years after the passing of the Act, was kept up to a remarkable degree. The newspapers, of all shades of opinion, were fully occupied with it, and an enormous mass of literature grew up around this celebrated case. Without referring further to the collateral case of Logan vs. City of Winnipeg, it may be stated that in 1893 an appeal was made to the Governor-General-in-Council by Archbishop Tache, asking for relief for the minority in Manitoba. A writer of the time says: "Ottawa, Jan. 22.—It was an historic scene which was enacted yesterday in the Privy Council Chamber here. . . . Every leading newspaper in the Dominion had its representative present." The reference by the Governor-General-in-Council to the Supreme Court of Canada then took place; and in due time the Government of Canada made a demand on the Government of Manitoba to reinstate the minority in the rights claimed. On the refusal of the Manitoba Government, the Government at Ottawa introduced a remedial bill, according to the provision made by the British North America Act, to provide separate schools for the minority. The Province, and even the whole Dominion, was ablaze with excitement. It was probably about this time when the Mulvey School, on Maryland Street, one night took fire. While the conflagration was going on a gentleman, looking at the blaze as he walked up Portage Avenue, was heard to remark: "It beats all, how this Manitoba School question does keep up." Certainly the comparison was none too strong.

The entrance of the question into the Dominion Parliament was one of the most startling events known in Canadian life. The opposition, in the greatest battle of obstruction ever seen in the House, fought every step. The question was talked out of the House, while meantime the period of that Parliament expired.

In 1896 this question defeated the Dominion Government, and Hon. Wilfrid Laurier formed his ministry, which has lasted to the present day. The steps taken by the new premier to settle this burning question cannot now be treated.

HIGHER EDUCATION.

In 1892 Manitoba College increased its capacity by doubling the size of its building. It was joined a few years before (1889) by its neighbor, Wesley College, the youngest of the college sisterhood. The chief educational developments of the Province have since taken place in the growth of the university. In the last decade of the century legislation permitting teaching in the University was obtained, the patents for the University land grant of 150,000 acres were secured, the present site was given by the Dominion Government to the Uni-

versity, and in 1900 the university building was erected. For thirteen years co-operation in science between the colleges led the way to a fuller provision for this important department. The sale of university land, and the gift of \$20,000 by Lord Strathcona, made an advance possible. Six professors will now give their undivided time in the Science Faculty to the several departments established. This means much for higher education, while college co-operation has this year been greatly advanced as well. The higher education of the Province can now keep step with the material advancement of the country. It is the fashion to point to the enormous development of Winnipeg as a business and railway centre, can we not, in looking back, say that educationally few, if any, new communities have ever made the progress that Manitoba has done in the first generation of its history!

**PUBLICATIONS
OF
Prof. Geo. Bryce, LL.D., F.R.S.C.**

MANITOBA COLLEGE, WINNIPEG

Author of articles "Manitoba" and "Winnipeg" in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*; of "Canada" in *Narrative and Critical History of America*; "Winnipeg," "Hudson's Bay Company," "Manitoba" and "British Columbia" in *Encyclopaedia Americana*; and of "The Indians" and "Education in Manitoba" in the new Canadian *Encyclopaedia*.

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